



Advocacy and Action  
for Connecticut's  
Mental Health

**Testimony of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Connecticut  
Before the Committee on Children, February 25, 2015  
Regarding**

**Raised SB No. 927, AN ACT CONCERNING SECLUSION AND  
RESTRAINT IN SCHOOLS.**

Good afternoon Senator Bartolomeo and Representative Urban, and members of the Children's Committee, my name is Susan Kelley and I am the Public Policy Manager of Child/Adolescent/Young Adult Issues for the National Alliance on Mental Health of Connecticut (NAMI Connecticut). NAMI Connecticut is a grassroots organization dedicated to building better lives for all individuals and families affected by and/or living with mental illness. NAMI CT is a partner alongside individuals with lived experience and 10 state agencies in the Connecticut Restraints and Seclusion Prevention Initiative Partnership (RS Prevention Initiative). My testimony concerns ***SB No. 927***.

NAMI CT and Keep the Promise Children's Committee, of which NAMI CT is the fiduciary, is in favor of this important bill. As highlighted by the work of the RS Prevention Initiative, Connecticut has been and continues to be a leader in taking steps to reduce the use of restraints and seclusion in public and private facilities throughout the state. We commend Connecticut for its leadership. Not only should we eliminate the use of restraints and seclusion because it can harm students, but research also overwhelmingly shows that it is ineffective in improving behavior.

Unfortunately, the use of physical restraint and seclusion persists in Connecticut schools. The Office of the Child Advocate found, in its recent report "Seclusion and Restraint in Connecticut Schools: A Call to Action," that each year there are more than 30,000 incidents of seclusion and restraint affecting more than 2,500 Connecticut students. Not only do children deserve better but we need to put an end to restraints and seclusion that are often used to control the behavior of our most vulnerable children—those with emotional and/or developmental disorders.

Many states are issuing new policies and laws restricting restraint and seclusion in schools, and federal legislation has been proposed on this issue under the Keeping All Students Safe Act by Connecticut State Senator Chris Murphy. In response to

proposed legislation, some school teachers have raised the issue of safety, saying things like “what else are we supposed to do?” We appreciate the concerns of the teachers who undertake the hard work of teaching our children, and we are mindful that safety can’t be overlooked. That’s why we agree with the OCA’s report recommendations that more school support and alternatives to restraints and seclusion need to be in place, “including training and capacity building, for schools to meet the varied and specialized learning needs of children with disabilities.”

I would like to call attention to the success of the Plainfield Public schools (Plainfield) in reducing restraint and seclusion. They presented their success story at the RS Prevention Initiative’s second annual conference in 2014, which had over 450 people in attendance. The 2013 and 2014 conferences have showcased the policies and evidence-based practices, such as the Six Core Strategies and ARC trauma-informed model (Attachment, Self -Regulation, and Competency) that have been successful in reducing the use of restraints and seclusion in all kinds of Connecticut facilities, including psychiatric facilities, juvenile residential homes, jails and prisons, and schools.

Plainfield implemented the Six Core Strategies to reduce restraints from 120 reported incidents in 2011/2012 to 22; and seclusion from 17 reported incidents in 2012-2013 to 10 in 2013/2014. (see Plainfield presentation, attached). Their priority for 2014-2015 is to “collaborate with mental health treatment facilities in CT that have reduced/eliminated restraint and seclusion.”

Plainfield provides a great example of how alternatives to restraint and seclusion can and do work. SB 927 would help make the reduction of restraints and seclusion throughout Connecticut schools a reality. We urge you to act in favor of this bill.

Thank you for this opportunity to address the Children’s Committee.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Kelley  
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NAMI Connecticut; Staff to Keep the Promise Coalition